

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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Myna Study by the Royal Ontario Museum by Allan J. Baker, Ph.D. Head,
Dept. of Ornithology.

When I got back to Canada I quickly got to work on the measurements from each of the Indian samples of mynas we collected. Enclosed is a table from a manuscript I have almost completed, showing geographic variation of birds in the subcontinent. The variation shows only a poor correspondence with climatic variation so I am wondering whether the former is related to interspecific competition in a systematic way. Much theory and some data is accumulating in ecological work suggesting that size variation among localities may relate to size of competitors, size of food available and number of foods.

Moeed has completed a survey of the foods in the guts of the birds we collected. There is a clear separation of foods taken by males and females. In Bangalore, only the females ate gryllid crickets, coccinellid beetles and dipteran larvae. Males ate smaller prey, especially isopteran termites and formicid ants, and they alone ate Solanum, grapes and figs. This niche diversification by the sexes is quite startling. We wish we had even more guts to substantiate our findings in greater detail, but this must await the future.

TABLE II
Means + standard errors (S.E.) of 9 characters of 10 samples of common mynas.

Sex	Characters						Weight	Tarsus length	Middle toe length
	Bill length	Premaxilla length	Bill width	Wing length	Bill depth	Tail length			

Effects of Drought on Birds-Observations from Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary*
by R.K. Bhatnagar, Abraham Verghese, and A.K. Chakravorthy

There is an increasing disturbance to water bird populations in India. Habitats such as marshes, swamps, ponds, etc. are being transformed for use by the public. For instance, between 1974-79, devegetation of tanks, creation of new housing colonies and extensive cultivation have been the cause of the loss of several places as habitats for water-birds around Bangalore. The gradual disappearance of suitable breeding sites for water-birds and waders have had pronounced negative effects. Besides man-made disturbances, natural calamities also make many areas unsuitable as habitats for water-birds.

The failure of the rains during the monsoon period (June-August) in 1979 resulted in a severe drought in Bharatpur and surrounding areas. It was at this time (Nov'79) that Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary was visited, in the hope that suggestions based on a survey might help in redevelopment programmes in the event of a future drought. The sanctuary was also visited in March'79, before the drought. Some of the differences observed prior to and during the drought are given below:

Table I - Some features of the avifauna, prior to - and during drought in Bharatpur Sanctuary

	March, 1979	November, 1979
1. Number of species of water-birds	28	15
2. Types of habitats	Bare shores, sparsely vegetated ridges and flats, reedy fronts, swampy areas, submergent, floating and emergent vegetation.	Drylands, mud-flats, swampy areas and shallow water areas.
3. Proportion of water-birds and waders	More water-birds than waders	More waders than water-birds
4. Group behaviour	Well-defined, water-birds in stable distribution patterns.	Ill-defined. Haphazardly distributed. Frequent coalescing and splitting in the group observed.
5. Feeding behaviour	Normal e.g. Shoveller with its spatulate bill half immersed in water, strains out minute food particles.	Deviated from normal. Many ducks feeding like waders.

*A contribution from 'Amateur Birdwatching Association, Bangalore.

Areas under water were considerably reduced during the drought. Consequently, the aquatic vegetation and subsequent organisms were drastically affected. The number of piscivorous birds like darters, cormorants, kingfishers and shag were almost negligible during drought most probably due to the inadequate number of fishes. None of the aquatic birds were found nesting or breeding. The majority of the migratory birds failed to settle in the sanctuary.

Depth in meters

Vegetation types

Water surface
0-0.35	<u>Floating vegetation</u> -surface seizers: Gulls
0.35-0.55	<u>Emergent vegetation</u> -surface plungers: Dabchick
0.55-1.00	<u>Submergent vegetation</u> ! Deep plungers:
1.00-1.50	<u>Clear water zone</u> ! Kingfishers

The varying depths of water provided (as shown above) habitats preferred by the various species. However, due to reduction in water level, these habitats were destroyed during the drought. In dry areas, water-birds were replaced by terrestrial birds, the dominant species being, pied myna (sturnus contra) .

Because of the drought, the birds were more prone to attack by the prey species, while flocks were also disturbed by the tourists, herdsmen and cattle.

Table-II - Relative importance of prey birds, herdsmen, cattle and tourists as agents of distribution to water-birds.

	<u>Per cent disturbance</u>
Prey birds	37.93
Herdsmen	03.44
Cattle	34.44
Tourists	24.18

The few refuge pools of water were preferred by the grazing cattle on account of the grass and water availability. The herdsmen, controlling the grazers also encroached on the habitats of the birds. The predatory birds though few, had a smaller foraging area, and often frequented the feeding zones of the water-birds, causing considerable alarm among them. Birds were also sensitive to the movement of tourists.

To judge the quality of a place (sanctuary, for example) we should consider human pressure, environmental factors and plants and animals. Often, vegetation is the parameter by which to characterize a place. The initial survey has revealed that the relationships between water and birds are not simple, but are a complex of interacting factors. It needs only an occasional drought to render a major part of the sanctuary lifeless. But,

we wonder how much time will it take for vegetation to regenerate and birds to settle and breed?

Some suggestions

1. Wetland habitats both within and outside the State (Rajasthan) need to be preserved and protected from disturbance.
2. Revegetation programme should be launched. Eg: A stock of drought resistant plants can be maintained.
3. The sanctuary area should not be subjected to grazing, although limited grazing may confer some advantages to the birds.
4. A selected area in the sanctuary at least should have perennial source of water.
5. Special consideration should be given to birds having specialized feeding/nesting requirements. There are few (e.g. Siberian Crane) birds of special conservation value. Bharatpur sanctuary seems to be the only refuge for this bird in winter.
6. Involvement of villagers in conservation programmes should be encouraged.
7. Some deep trenches/pits be dug, so that sufficient water can be accumulated and supplied to areas without any water during drought.

Acknowledgement: Details of the visit will be published elsewhere. Thanks are due to villagers for assisting in field work and with whom we had very interesting discussions on the birds of the sanctuary.

Editors note: In this connection, readers are referred to Dr. Salim Ali's article on the same topic in the issue of Hornbill, No.13, Oct-Nov. 79. We reproduce below a short extract from his notes about the Bharatpur drought.

" 'While it is a disappointing year for birdwatchers I feel that the drought is a blessing in disguise for the sanctuary itself. Under the new water management plan the Ghana had remained inundated throughout the year, contrary to the conditions obtained previously. As a result many of the trees that afforded nesting sites to the birds were killed off by water logging. The drying of the lake bed this year will enable the older trees to recuperate and the seedlings and saplings to grow up above the normal water level before the next monsoon. The freedom from smothering by the birds' nests and excreta will give a further breathing space to the trees and provided next year's monsoon is normal, I think there will on the whole be cause for the Ghana to be thankful to the drought rather than the other way round, and there is no need to worry about its future or about its bird populations."

Circular letter from Lavkumar Khacher

After writing the last Circular Letter from Siliguri I again went up into Sikkim and travelled further up the Teesta valley, the aim being to get right upto the Tibetan border. Unfortunately I was held up by a blizzard in the narrow upper Teesta gorge a little short of where the valley opens out into broader Tibetan vistas and I was advised against proceeding further as there had been snowfall of over a meter and there were indications of more to follow. I reluctantly retraced my steps down the gorge having in mind the Arunachal Pradesh schedule. I did, however, have a look up the Zemu Chhu, a major tributary of the Teesta and one of the important rivers draining the northern section of the Khangchendzonga National Park. It is a pleasure to inform you that there are some magnificent forests of eastern Himalayan conifers, high altitude oak and rhododendron forests on either side of the Teesta with ideal country for Tragopans. That these pheasants are still plentiful is also apparent from indications in the fresh snow and from the discussions I had with officers of the Armed Forces and the local people. In Gangtok I had a discussion with the Chief Conservator of Forest, Government of Sikkim and have indicated the areas to him. In the report I am formulating for WWF-India I propose their inclusion in the new Park.

In the Kameng Division of Arunachal Pradesh the entire foothill range is covered by a dense, almost untouched forest with ecological types ranging from tropical Assam plains forest to temperate evergreen broadleaved forests of oak and rhododendron. A section of this stretch of forest has already been declared a game reserve and the rest of the sections are being identified as reserve forests. The entire stretch is still rich in wildlife and though I was not there for sufficient time to determine all the species of pheasants present, I can affirm the presence of Red Jungle Fowl, Kaleej and Grey Peacock Pheasant. The higher ranges in the interior also had extensive tracts of temperate forests largely untouched, though the lower, middle altitude forests have to a very great extent been badly damaged by the slash and burn method of farming practiced by the tribal population. This practice is being actively discouraged by the Arunachal Pradesh Administration and sections of the deforested mountainsides are showing a vigorous regeneration by Pinus excelsa.

The high altitude forests apparently still have good populations of Tragopans (species apparently Satyr), Monal and Blood Pheasants. It was amazing to see how most of the men and women and older children readily identified the pheasants of the area from the illustrations in Phillip Wayre's book which I had with me. To test their veracity further, I asked to indicate where each species was to be expected and in every case they pointed to the right type of forest, viz. Kaleej in the lower valley forests, Tragopan in the upper, middle altitude forests, Monal and Blood Pheasants near the treeline and above. They also spoke of the horns of the cock Tragopan, and that while the Blood Pheasants went about in flocks, the Monal and Tragopans were seen either singly or in pairs! Several villagers offered to capture live birds, explaining that they use snares made of wires and bamboo strips in which the birds get their legs caught.

Both in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh more intensive, localised surveys are called for to identify the best forests for sanctuary status. On any such surveys, it would be essential that tribals from the areas be hired to help on the surveys. From Tawang it is possible to get a long view into Eastern Bhutan and I was struck by a very prominent mountain which seems to dominate the foothill ranges and appears to draw considerable cloud up its slopes. This mountain needs to be given a very careful look as a potential area for preservation.

The nesting of Ashy Wren-Warbler (*Prinia socialis*) in Bangalore* by A.K. Chakravarty, S. Subramanya, and S. Nagarajan.

A nest of the Ashy Wren-Warbler was found on a farm in Bangalore on 24th August, 1978.

From the observations given below, it is interesting to note that the change in the technique of feeding coincided with the change in the type and size of the prey. We presume that the increasing demand for food by the developing nestlings was met by a shift from insects with lesser biomass (=weight) to a higher biomass. Week-old nestlings were fed with soft bodied and small insects, and two week-old nestlings with large insects.

Developmental changes in the Chicks of Ashy Wren-Warbler

<u>Date</u>	<u>Morphological changes in Chicks:</u>
12-9-78	Two skinny, nidicolous, altricial nestlings with closed eyes, yellow beak and rudimentary wing pads. Yellow gape with two, black, dot like structures. Nestlings responding to thigmotactic stimuli. Nestlings being fed with soft bodied insects (e.g. aphids, coccids, etc.). Food is placed deep into the throat.
14-9-78 & 15-9-78	Black hairs along capital tract, spinal tract (cervical region), interscapular region, humeral tract, femoral tract and crural tract.
16-9-78	Nestlings exhibiting movements.
17-9-78	Nestlings can raise neck. Feathers on malar and submalar region. Older nestling with eye-slits.
18-9-78	Eyes opened in older nestling; other with eye-slits. Capital, spinal, humeral and alar tracts with well developed feathers in older nestling. Yellowish black hairs on caudal tract. On disturbance, nestlings uttered kiizz.....kiizz. Toes with whitish claws.
19-9-78	Humeral and spinal tract with black feathers. Ventral tract yellowish. Nestlings weakly responding to visual stimuli. Nestlings being fed with hard-bodied insects (e.g. Grasshopper, medium sized butterflies). Food is placed into the mouth cavity.

*A contribution from "Amateur Birdwatching Association, Bangalore.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Morphological changes in Chicks:</u>
20-9-78	Feathers originating from feather sheath - very prominent in alar tract. Beak orangish. White hairs on ventral side. Toes well developed. Nostrils opened. Body covered with feathers. Older nestling gives off a low whistle - Flee...Fleeall..... on disturbance.
22-9-78	Eyes fully opened in younger nestling. Primaries smoky colored.
23-9-78	Smoky and cream colored feathers well developed on dorsal and ventral sides. Thigmotactic stimuli failed to elicit response in nestlings. The nestlings showed concealing tendencies on approach to the nest.
24-9-78	Feathers on tail bud. Orangish tinge on vent. Chicks capable of weak flight. Older chick can preen, fly and call chiss..... chiss.

Owls and the Solar Eclipse by Y.M. Rai & Mukul Sharma

We had selected an old banyan tree (Ficus bengalensis) at the edge of Hastinapur forest to observe the activities of three spotted owlets (Athene brama) in a hole. Here the eclipse was between 2.36 p.m. and 4.49 p.m. with 60% of the total disc dark at 3.47 p.m. At 60% the sunlight was soft, dull and reddish. The owlets started getting active an hour after the eclipse began. By the peak time all the three had come out of the hole and for the next fifty minutes they were most active, flying from branch to branch, preening their feathers, bobbing up and down and calling when alarmed. Exactly at the peak time (greatest phase) a Collared Scops Owl (Otus bakkomona) called for a second time. Its first call was exactly when the eclipse began. No other call of this owl was heard besides these two.

lowest

Owl activities were at their height when the sun was getting clear. Quite unexpectedly, two Great Horned Owls (Bubo bubo) had flown from the forest to a tall shrub about fifty metres away from the banyan tree and revealed their presence by unearthly, two syllabled loud calls resembling the weeping of a man over a terrible loss (Will the readers enlighten us how much these owls can imitate human voices?). During the next 25 minutes of their stay, there were several wailing calls before they flew back when the sunlight grew much brighter.

Birds' activities were at their when the eclipse was clearing after 4.00 p.m. There were fewer calls and no food hunting on shrubs and undergrowth. The most conspicuous was the silence of the Large Green Barbet (Megalaima zeylanica) that stopped its continuous call ten minutes after the greatest phase and resumed after thirtyfive minutes. After about half an hour's pause, the birds' activities increased. Even the gusty wind had dropped during this period.

Observation of some birds in Burnihat Valley Assam/Meghalaya during Solar Eclipse on 16-2-1980 by Dr. SAS Biswas

Burnihat Valley is situated 24 kms south of Gauhati (Assam) and 85 kms north of Shillong (Meghalaya) and located at NS $91^{\circ} 9'$ and 92° to $25^{\circ} 3'$ & $26^{\circ} 1'$ EW. Vide SAS Biswas in Newsletter 21(12):10.1979 for general account of the area. The solar eclipse here began at 2.52 PM and ended at 5.00 PM. On that day I made the following observation on some birds:

- 2.58 PM: Observed a pair of house sparrow copulating under window shade only once.
- 3.00 PM: One hill crow probably female making calls as if to report the unusual happening of nature. Deshi myna was heard making high pitched calls.
- 3.50 PM: Solitary male purple sunbird dancing with its feathers-raised on top of the Premna latifolia tree looking towards the sun. The calls appeared as if it was inviting its female partner. I could not find the female.
- 3.58 PM: Flock of cattle egrets gathered at a spot to fly back to their home. Their standard time 5.00 p.m. which I have been observing their returning time for the past one month. Some of them were observed flying off. As the eclipse began ending the birds relaxed but dismayed. They flew off just 10 minutes before the end of the eclipse.
- 4.30 PM: A solitary ashy shrike was observed flying high in sky cutting small circles and making high pitched calls.

During the eclipse I could not locate a single bird feeding on the ground or elsewhere. No kites and eagles were observed flying.

Effects of 70% solar eclipse on birds at Jodhpur by Indra Kumar Sharma

On 16th February, 1980 I observed the effects of the 70% solar eclipse at Jodhpur. I observed that there was no notable effect on the activities of birds until over 50% of the sun was eclipsed. The crows, doves and other birds then came out into the open from the shades of trees. When the eclipse got to be about 70% (15.50 hours) the doves, kites and crows began to move towards their distant roosting sites, as they usually do in the late afternoon (say around 17.30 hours). But at 16.10 hours, when the sunlight re-intensified, the birds which were setting off for their roosts realised their mistake and returned to feed.

Later that afternoon, the birds were confused, they did not begin to proceed to their roost site even after 18.00 hours, mistaking this ~~this~~ as another trick, as happened at 15.50 hours. Much later the birds realised their mistake and hurriedly proceeded to their roost sites and settled in a rather disturbed and unusual way.

Harriers by ZF

During February/March this year I engaged myself a great deal observing harriers. A pair was usually around the Dodda Gubbi Lake and in the evening light their superb colouring revealed itself in splendid detail "rufous, dark brown, black, white, and clear grey". The female has a buff head, which makes it even more spectacular. These birds spent a lot of time sitting on the ground, but from time to time they flew vigorously along the reed infested borders of the lake looking for prey. When they were on their tour of inspection panic spread through the land. The dozen greenshanks which were always around flew away in agitation: red-wattled lapwings were more aggressive and dive bombed on the harriers with considerable determination. I doubt if a harrier has ever made a meal of a lapwing. Egrets and pond herons also showed some trepidation, but I never succeeded in watching a harrier land on avian prey. I saw them occasionally stopping in their tracks and descending on perhaps a largish insect.

Some distance away from the lake there is a large area of varkas land covered with coarse grass and this is a favourite hunting ground of the pale harriers. I have seen four birds at a time sailing over this stretch of country, relying on wind currents to take them along. These birds, as EHA says, know how to cancel the laws of gravitation and to watch them in the evening light against the background of undulating country dotted with the green of casuarinas and eucalyptus, can sustain a birdwatcher for many long minutes. I believe both the pale as well as the Montague's harriers were present here. **The Montague's harrier has a dark black line across the secondaries,** while the pale harrier only has pale grey wings with black edged primaries.

One day I watched the four birds for a full hour, but I was unable to see them hunt successfully even once during that period. Obviously they do not expend too much energy in moving around otherwise they could not sustain themselves for such long periods without an intake.

One of my cherished desires has been to locate the roosting tree of harriers. Apparently they do congregate at night in one spot and distribute themselves widely during the day so that each bird has adequate feeding territory for itself. Much more sensible than the human race who charge towards the city centre in day time and drive one another crazy by their unwanted proximity.

Peregrine's progress - Release project a success (Courtesy, Endangered Species Technical Bulletin)

Four peregrine falcons (1 male and 3 females) are now on their own in Washington, D.C. and vicinity - the result of a release project conducted by the Service and the Peregrine Fund of Cornell University. The peregrines had been placed in a man-made nest on top of the Interior Department building in June, as month-old chicks (see the July 1979 Bulletin), and were released on July 9, after they had fledged.

Under the watchful eyes of Sharon and Tom Allan, the birds made their initial flights and developed the skills necessary for hunting. On August 6, the Allans departed and the birds were completely self-sufficient.

The birds have been adjusting well to the urban environment and have been establishing territories throughout the area. One has been spotted near a suburban Virginia shopping center, and another has chosen to roost on the Department of Commerce building and use the Mall near the Smithsonian Institution as its territory.

It is not known whether any of the peregrines will stay in the Washington area during the winter, or choose to migrate south along the coast, or even if they will return to the area next year. It is hoped that these falcons will select mates within 2 years from other captive-bred peregrines released by Cornell in the East, and eventually produce young.

'Bayas' Select Eucalyptus for Nesting by H.N. Mathur

During a visit to the Central Soil & Water Conservation Research & Training Institutes Research Farm at Selakui, Dehra Dun during April 1979 I was surprised to see a 'baya' nest built on a Eucalyptus hybrid (3 years old) plant, in a rather low lying area. There are other trees in the vicinity where 'bayas' make nests. I thought it was a one time chance, and that an enterprising and adventurous male was trying to woo a.....lady 'baya'.

On the 20th of February 1980 I along with two others again came across 'bayas' on Eucalyptus trees (4 years old and about 10 m. high) and this time not a single but on 2 trees at a place called Mazaprabad, Distt. Saharanpur about 40 km. south of Dehra Dun across the Siwalik hills. The trees have been planted on either side of a 3-4 meters wide and about a meter deep waterway in an agricultural area. The nesting height was about 4 m. above ground level.

Another very attractive site near Mazaprabad was a group of about 50 'baya' nests in a single Ficus plant growing on the inside of an abandoned well, all the nests were hanging over the well, the water was about 5 m. below the nests. The location of the nests put it in a very safe place from all the sides - only birds could approach these.

Breeding Colony of Water Birds Near Seelaj by Yashesh H. Chhaya

Very close to Ahmedabad there is a village called Seelaj. On the outskirts of this village there is a lake, in the middle of which there is a small island where a few acacia and prosopis spaciata trees survive which provide the nesting site for storks, ibis, egrets etc.

This heronry consists of openbilled stork which I have seen nearly 80 to 90 birds in August 1978 along with stork white ibis, egrets also breeds there.

In the beginning of the rainy season, water birds start coming to this place. In July - August they are busy breeding the eggs and feeding the young ones.

In October 1979 when we visited this place with Shri Kartikaya Sarabhai, Honorary Secretary, North Gujarat Branch of World Wildlife Fund, we saw a very few openbilled storks which was quite a surprise but we saw plenty of painted storks and black ibis.

It was wonderful sight to see these feathered friends busy feeding young ones. They were flying and making noisy cackling. Dr. Salim Ali was pleased to see this beautiful herony when he visited Ahmedabad in October 1979.

The North Gujarat Branch of World Wildlife Fund-India is planning to save this colony by planting new trees and putting up signboards with birds' pictures and descriptions. The villagers are giving their full co-operation to save their useful friend.

An observation on the behaviour of captive parakeets by N. Santhiah, and T.G. Manmohan Singh

I would like to report an interesting observation on behaviour of parakeets maintained in a cage in the Insectary Building Compound of Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University, Hyderabad where the ICAR Scheme for Studies on Biology and Control of Bird pests is located.

Twelve roseringed parakeets (both male and female Psittacula krameri) are being maintained since October 1975 in a cage measuring 11 x 5.70 x 2.85 mts, for studies like daily food intake, food preference etc. from time to time. These parakeets were caught from the fields and hence their age is not known. They were fed with seeds of sunflower, rice grains, fruits, groundnut and Bengal gram.

During the period October 1975 to October 1978 the male and female parakeets in the cage remained quite separate and did not show any signs of pairing. This was so even during the breeding season (January to May) in the years 1976, 1977 and 1978. However, during early part of November 1978, the male and female parakeets were found pairing and by the month-end six pairs of these parakeets were formed. They entered the earthen pots kept for egg laying. These earthen pots were fixed in the cage so as to simulate the hollows of tree trunks. On 5th December 1978 at about 11.30 a.m. the staff members of the scheme in the Laboratory (distance of 21 metres from the cage) heard loud distress calls of the parakeets from the cage. On rushing to the cage, it was found that the panic among parakeets was due to the presence of a Cobra (Naja naja) in the cage. This snake had entered the cage through a crevice. The snake was immediately chased and killed. The crevice in the cage was closed to prevent any recurrence of such an event.

After this incident, no further breeding activities were observed and subsequently the pair bond was broken. So far though the birds occasionally enter the earthen pots, no egg laying occurred.

It is therefore inferred that a sense of insecurity was created among the parakeets due to the snake and has probably acted as an inhibitory factor for egg laying. I shall be happy to hear from the readers of the Newsletter their views on the reported observation and if a similar incident has been observed by them, they may enlighten the readers.

"Birdwatching from the rear window" by Ex.Capt. Tony Fernandez

It was Tuesday 20 Nov. 79, my first working day of a 2nd shift week. My wife and two daughters had gone to school. It was about nine, when I saw a peculiar little bird that looked like a robin on the ground. Immediately I got hold of Salim Ali's Indian birds and my binoculars and sat still at the rear window and watched this tiny fellow hopping and catching insects on the run and sometimes holding his wings out threateningly to trap the small moths which flew. This I checked was the Blue Throat. While I was busy watching him there were many other birds in the trees viz; Redvented Bulbul, Roseringed Parakeet, Blossomheaded Parakeet, Brahminy Myna, House Sparrow, Common Babbler, House Crow, Common Myna and the Pied Myna. A Tailor Bird comes by flipping its wings with a characteristic crack (something like the crack of a whip) and its tail continually bobbing but mostly up.

A Magpie Robin comes next on the bayrae branch darts down for a moth and disappears to the next yard. At the same time come along the Ashy ~~Wren~~-Warbler (215) flitting from one close branch to the other searching behind almost every leaf. Another peculiar bird that got me stuck was almost the size of a bulbul. It landed at the foot of a drumstick tree and after going round in a curious fashion took off, and landed on the bayrae trunk. Its now that I noticed its head taking almost a full half turn (180°) to look behind. Its colouring also was quite curious. It had a pattern of black behind its neck and into its back which looked like a few black hairy worms creeping up his neck. Yes, it is was the Wryneck (155). But I had never noticed this bird before in Bhopal.

Along with these two birds were also the Lesser White Throat (205) and the Purple Sunbird. Also a flock of White-eyes flew from tree to tree and you could hear their continuous call as though each bird had its turn to call.

Another incident of interest was that of the Iora (190). It was laboriously searching for insects on the bayrae tree among the leaves and just when it succeeded in disturbing a moth which it just missed gobbling at the first attempt and fell to the ground, maybe slightly injured. The Iora went after it on the ground but before he could even take a bite a Redvented Bulbul darted down and chased the Iora and gobbled up the moth. Might is right: I suppose!!!

Other birds which landed in were the Redstart (227), Rufousbacked Shrike, Jungle Crow, Crow Pheasant and the White Spotted Fantail Flycatcher. A pair of Whitebellied Drongos with their musical call and a pair of Common Black Drongos were on the keiker tree for sometime. A Whitebreasted Waterhen did a quick face presentation and disappeared in a jiffy. A Pied Kingfisher was seen on the wing flying across.

And finally, there was one warbler I did not notice before which got onto every tree big & small and would inspect almost every leaf. It was the Yellow Browed Leaf Warbler (not shown in Indian Birds but can be seen at serial 94 of 'The young specialist looks at Birds' by Heinrich Frieling).

Could anyone let me know if this bird was noticed in Central India before?

CorrespondenceNewsletter by Lavkumar Khacher

Two days back the boat from Jamnager brought me my mail. There were two welcome items. The first was an intimation that the Ahmedabad Custom's Authorities had permitted the entry of a gift camera and tele lense after imposing a token fine of Rs.150/- only - this because of the work we are doing to get children involved with Natura; the second was the March Newsletter for Birdwatchers.

What a shock it was to find the Newsletter naked. I thought it was because the editor was chagrined about the wrong identity of the bird, but then in broad daylight I read the red slip and saw the sad reason why. It is to the eternal credit of our editor that this very useful monthly is now in its twentieth year. Surely all those who talk loudly about conservation should be more careful to keep this most useful link alive and thriving. It is surprising that conservation organisations have not considered this useful publication worth financing.

This Newsletter has two very important roles to play. Firstly, which other publication is going to provide space for amateurs to write in? Secondly citing my own experience, had there been no Newsletter, would I have known that there was a knowledgeable birdman in Madras, when I visited it last year in March? For both these instances I have V. Santharam in mind. His notes are excellent. In fact, when I went to Madras, I made it a point to find him. Expecting him to be a rather oldish, perhaps greying individual of British vintage, you'll appreciate my pleasant surprise to find the author of several well written notes to be a young, shy, college student, one of our "irresponsible young generation". Santharam's mother fed me on her special preparations, small sweet bananas and coffee. The young birdman next morning took me to his birding haunts around the Adyar estuary. My visit to Madras was made - I've fallen in love with that lovely countryside, that clear sea, and those "parochial Tamilians" who will not learn Hindi but certainly speak it! I have now a good friend in the deep south just as he has one in this part of the country. All this thanks to the Newsletter. It must thrive! So friends, please do send in your Rs.15/-.

I might suggest two little schemes - like our various banks are doing. a. If you can afford it, put Rs.200 in a savings account, and instruct the Bank to directly remit the subscription. It'll be cheaper in the long run as the rupee gets compressed in value. b. Have a piggy bank and all the little change at the end of the day should go into it. The fattened piglet should then be selugthered on New Year's day.

The problem is not that we cannot afford the small sum, or do not want to give it, but that it slips the mind, or we keep on putting off the tedious chore of going to the post office to make the remittance to "tomorrow", and tomorrow, as we all know, never comes.

I am writing this little homily on a spit of sand with broad mud flats in front and behind me. The sun is brilliant but I am sheltered by a grass thatch, and the air coming off the sea is cool. The mud flats are covered by a large variety of waders busy feeding before the tide comes back and the water starts lapping hardly twenty feet away on either side! The tides in the Gulf of Kutch are among the highest in the world and Pirotan island, on which I am, along with the entire northern coastline of the Saurashtra peninsula is one of the world's most important wintering area for palearctic waders.

Through my binoculars I can see common stints, sanderlings, curlew sandpipers, dunlin, knots, broadbilled sandpipers, terek sandpipers, turnstones, oystercatchers, bartailed godwits, whimbrels, curlews, crab plovers, large sand plovers, several species of gulls and terns, grey herons, large white egrets, reef herons, white ibises, painted storks and pond herons. This year the two species of flamingos are absent, all concentrated as they are in the flooded Great Rann of Kutch.

A happy piece of news to pass on to all nature lovers is that this wonderful place will be declared a marine sanctuary by the Gujarat Government. I'll remember to notify all future programmes here through our Newsletter. So, please do be chivalrous and cover the poor lady!

And finally, dear Editor, We'll question your competence to be the editor only after the Newsletter becomes a viable publication with a multi-million rupee intake. There'll be many many takers then, till then even if you call a hoopoe a woodpecker or an egret a crane it'll pass muster.

(Lavkumar ki jai. Editor)

A case of tumour in Siberian Crane by R.K. Bhatnagar

During a visit to the Bharatpur Sanctuary from 3rd to 7th March, 1979, I happened to have observed Siberian Cranes usually in groups of 6 to 9 individuals, every afternoon on the north eastern portion of the lake. On two succeeding watching trips I observed that one adult Siberian Crane had a protuberance just half way up on the back of his neck. It could be a helminthic cyst but cysts in such regions are of rare occurrence. From a distance in spite of binoculars it could not be ascertained whether it is suppurating or not but there was no visible flowing wound and this suggests that it was a tumour. It would be interesting if the individual could be mist-netted and examined to see whether it is in an infective stage, or malignant or otherwise. This appears all the more desirable as only 60 odd pairs are reported to survive at the present time.

Corrections by V. Santharam

I would like to make the following corrections in the article in the March issue before it draws the attention of our senior ornithologists and bird-watchers: (a) Page 3: The green sandpiper seen at Manali is not fully verified. It could even be a spotted sandpiper. (b) Page 6: I seemed to have confused whiskered tern with the gullbilled tern. Actually the gullbilled tern were observed only in the winter months and not as mentioned. (c) Page 8: The 'Bronzed' drongo has turned out to be the grey drongo. There are plenty of these birds around this year also. I feel it was the slimmer body and the tail which was in moult that caused this wrong identification. (d) Page 9: The stone curlew is very much a resident bird and has been recorded and observed at a nest at Adyar estuary last year (1979). It was the skulky and crepuscular habits that made it appear rare. I have been seeing these birds through last year here.

Nilgais near Narora by Abdul Jamil Urfi: Appropos your editorial query in my article, A Bird Sanctuary Near Narora (Vol.XX No.2 January, 1980), I have to say that nilgais' which were once abundant in the area near the Narora barrage are killed by shikaris from outside. The locals condemn shooting no doubt but are not so particular about this animal since it damages their crops at times, I think. Nilgais' are reported to wander long distances in search of food and are probably shot in areas quite detached from Narora.

Also I may add that the streaked babbler (Napothera brevicaudata) is not found in this area; rather it is the Turcloides earlei among reedy banks that is common and is named striated babbler in the handbook (Ali & Ripley). This mistake probably occurred while I was preparing my notes.

Koel by T.V. Jose

It is a common knowledge that young birds in general react to their parents' presence and, when they are strong enough in their period of dependency, even imitate their actions to perfection - especially, those that help to find food for themselves and protection from their enemies. By any reckoning, this is a vital process and the period a transitory one.

In my observations, however, I found one exception to this rule in the case of Koel chicks fostered by common house crows. Koel chicks do not move closely with the crows and get themselves trained in the art of fending and defending; they are often found perching on a branch of a tree calling tirelessly for food. Since koels have to subsist on food very different from that of crows in their adult life, I can understand, to some extent, why Koel chicks are not so ardent about finding the source of food, or knowing the method of getting it. What is however not equally understandable is how these chicks get themselves prepared, equipped and trained to later seek their own food, very different from that of crows, the source of which is utterly unknown to them, in order to lead an independent life.

Birds getting scarce by Ananta Mitra, March issue, 1980, mistakes in the text

I am glad that my above note has been published in the Newsletter. But unfortunately the correction of dates made in the manuscript, have been ignored and figures have been wrongly printed. Regarding the Collared Kingfisher and the Forest Wagtail, for the years 1966 and 1967, the dates have been advanced by ten years to 1976 and 1977 respectively. The conclusion of local scarcity is based on observations of last fourteen years and not four years only. If possible, a correction may kindly be published.

(The error - or rather, the many errors are regretted, and we offer our apologies. Editor)

Birdwatching at Nainital by Bipin Chandra Pande

A few years back Nainital was a paradise for birds. There was a lot of variety here which many claim was unequalled anywhere else. There were many varieties of birds in Sher Ka Danda in Nainital which were hardly found anywhere else. But on account of lopping or cutting down many useful oak and other trees, and an increase of houses and population, a remarkable change took place in the habits and variety of birdlife, because of the shortage of dense bushes or trees, they no longer feed or nest in Nainital.

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